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ABSTRACT

Field research was conducted to identify and examine the most recent trends in vocational and technical education during the Chinese Post-Cultural Revolution years of 1976-1981. Prior to the Revolution more than half of the middle school students participated in skill training before graduation. All such programs were abolished during the Revolution, and since then the recovery rate has been slow. Of the approximate 65 million middle school students, only 2 percent were enrolled in vocational and technical programs in 1979. Presently, work-study programs are being revived; in China's Jilin province primary and middle schools are operating 4,000 workshops and 15,000 farms. Part-time education has shown the greatest growth with a participation level of 68 million workers, peasants, and cadres. Now, instructional television programs are providing instruction to workers in general and technical education areas. Central Broadcasting and Television University, founded in 1979, is a degree-granting institution with 410,000 students. Tertiary industries have been established as local or neighborhood collectives. Their educational programs are small and informal, usually consisting of on-the-job training for entry level positions. And recently, on-the-job training in the form of apprenticeship has had renewed interest. Such programs and educational efforts are vital to China's future. If China is to achieve its goals of modernization and improvement of individual welfare, it can come only with continued growth in vocational and technical education at all levels. (BFB)

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TRENDS IN VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Note: The following is based on the author's four visits to the People's Republic of China between 1979 and 1981 and on related research.

Trends in vocational and technical education in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are influenced by changes in China's political, social and economic positions. Rebuilding from centuries of stagnation, a hundred years of colonial exploitation and more recently the Cultural Revolution, China looks ahead toward achieving its goals of modernization which will bring the country by the year 2000 to the technological level of developed countries. The following will identify and examine the most recent trends in vocational and technical education and the causes of these trends. Specifically, it will focus on changes in the Post-Cultural Revolution years of 1976-1981.

Rebuilding From A Decade of Turmoil

Prior to the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent reign of the Gang of Four (1966-76), vocational and technical education on the secondary level was an integral part of China's educational program. In many areas, more than half of the middle school (equivalent to American secondary school) students participated in some form of skill training before graduation. Post-secondary technical schools, often operated by industry in industrial settings, supplemented the secondary programs.

All such programs were abolished during the revolution as students, indoctrinated into the Red Guard, violently disrupted and often curtailed both education and production. Vocational and technical teachers, as well as cadres (administrators, supervisors, officials) were "sent down" to the countryside for "re-education." Untrained peasants (farm workers) were sent to the factories as replacements in an effort to rid education, industry, medicine, and the military of what was labeled "revisionism," or the emphasis on professionalism over ideology.

Although the revolution lasted only ten years, more than a decade of China's growth and development was lost. Almost an entire generation of Chinese, millions strong, lost their educational opportunities. Many of the youths and young adults who were "sent down" have never returned. For those who were in their formidable years of education, the Cultural Revolution was a disruption which will never be forgotten. The resulting frustration and bitterness is evident among the Chinese people and will probably affect China for a lifetime. The dearth of vocational and technical education programs created by the Cultural

Revolution is still evident. Of the approximate 65 million middle school students, only 2% were enrolled in vocational and technical programs in 1979.

But a new climate is developing. "Vocational and technical education is one of the high priorities in China today," a member of the Ministry of Education told me during one of my visits to China (Ministry of Education, 1979). His words are echoed in Chinese journals and periodicals as China confronts the need to prepare millions of new skilled workers. In the meantime, the problem is compounded annually as 7 to 10 million unskilled Chinese youths are graduated or leave middle school to be assimilated into the existing, largely unskilled work force.

Youth

The People's Republic of China is a country dominated by youth. The average age is 26 years. In a population of 1 billion (one out of every four people on the earth is Chinese) more than 600 million are less than 30 years old. There are 200 million teenagers and an additional 160 million people in their 20's; 380 million are less than 16 years old.

In a 1980 Children's Day celebration speech, Zhao Ziyang, Standing Committee Member of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and Vice-Premire of the State Council expressed the prevailing spirit:

> Training and educating the younger generation is a great task. Along with the shift in the focus of the Party's work and the development of the socialist modernization programme, the Party Central Committee has decided that in the 1980's greater efforts should be made and more effective measures adopted to improve and develop the work of educating children so as to carry (the modernization programme) to a new level (Zhao, p. 14).

This renewed spirit is having its effect on vocational and technical education.

Work Study

Work-study programs are being revived on both the primary and middle school levels. There are two major reasons for this: 1) to spur the development of vocational and technical skills prior to graduation from middle school; and 2) to provide much needed revenue to upgrade both primary and middle school facilities. Usually found in rural areas where state subsidies for locally operated schools are minimal, work-study programs provide funds for the operation of the school as well as an introduction to the socialist work ethic.

Primary students engage in farm and industrial production while developing elementary work skills. The actual labor equivalent is one-half month per school year, a requirement consistent with the national work standard for all primary students. On the middle school level, work-study programs develop students' skills in such areas as machine operation and mechanical maintenance and provide them with technical knowledge needed for advanced study. The manual labor requirement at the middle school level increases to two weeks per semester in the lower middle and three weeks in the upper middle school.

In China's Jilin province, 22,000 primary and middle schools are operating 4,000 workshops and 15,000 farms with an annual gross of 100 million yuan ($65 million) from the manufacture of goods and the production of grain. Net proceeds are spent on education. In 1976-78, work-study income was equivalent to one-third of the province's allocation for education.

Work-study programs are getting assistance from various groups including trade unions and professional groups. The national forum on education sponsored by the Ministry of Education from December 1-13, 1980 urged the restructuring of middle school education with the development of vocational and technical education with work-study components ("Forum on Educational Work," January 5, 1981). In Jilin province, a school-run industry company has been established with offices at provincial, prefectural and county levels to assist educators in establishing and expanding work-study programs. An important company function is to ascertain that workshop and farm activities do not dominate an educational program at the expense of the students' education. Supporters of work-study programs claim that students have exceeded the average scores on examinations for higher education and have been prepared for technical jobs in the work force.

Post-Secondary Programs

"Part-Time" Education

The greatest growth by far in vocational and technical education has taken place on the post-secondary level through "part-time" programs. While it is difficult to obtain an exact enrollment in part-time education, it is estimated that as many as 68 million workers, peasants, and cadres may be involved in some form of part-time study. (Part-time programs were previously referred to as spare-time programs. The terms "part-time" and "spare-time" are often used interchangeably.)

The Shanghai Workers Part-Time University with ten branch colleges is an example of a flourishing program. From a total enrollment of approximately 17,000 students, 6,000 come to class at the colleges;

the remaining 11,000 attend university classes through television facilities. Both day and night courses are offered. In Beijing a new part-time college opened its doors in February, 1981 as part of an increasing effort to raise the educational level of municipal staff members and workers. The college is one of several hundred part-time educational facilities located in China's capital.

Competition for credit enrollment in part-time programs is strong. Admission includes a recommendation from the student's work unit, successful completion of an entrance examination, completion of senior middle school or its equivalent, and three years of work experience. For the new Beijing college, more than 3,500 candidates were recommended by their factories and production units; 885 were selected to be part of the first class.

Part-time programs may last anywhere from several months to several years. At the Beijing school, students attend classes three half-days and two evenings every week while receiving full pay. Tuition is covered by the work units of each student. Both general and technical education is provided. Popular courses include the study of technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign language and environmental protection, a new field in China particularly promoted in large urban areas where pollution is a major problems.

Part-time education may be offered through many agencies including city trade unions, technical schools, colleges and universities. The new school in Beijing, for example, was founded by the Beijing Municipal Council of Trade Unions.

Instructional Television

The largest university in China is the Central Broadcasting and

Television University (CBTU). Headquartered in Beijing, it is referred to as Television University. A growing number of colleges and universities supplement the work of the CBTU with their own television studios and programs.

CBTU was founded in 1979 and presently has 410,000 regular students scattered throughout almost all parts of China. In addition, approximately 200,000 students are auditing courses while countless more benefit from informal viewing. Regular students are enrolled for credit after having been recommended for study by their work unit and after passing entrance examinations. Those who successfully complete a prescribed program are awarded a certificate or appropriate academic degree. (As of January 1, 1981, China started conferring the academic degrees of B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in accordance with the practice in most countries of the world.)

A most attractive feature of televised education (considered a form of part-time education) is the opportunity to provide education and training through China to millions of workers without disrupting those workers from their jobs. Eighteen basic and specialized courses were offered by CBTU th ~ugh a teaching schedule of more than 30 hours per week as of January, 1981. The courses can be divided into two categories: 1) technical courses such as mechanics, electronics, and agricultural science; and 2) general education including mathematics, physics, chemistry, and foreign language. The study of foreign languages is an important component of post-secondary technical training. Competency in a foreign language is essential for reading original technical materials. English is the most common foreign language offered.

Televised education is under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Education and the Broadcasting Administrative Bureau.

"Tertiary" Programs

Prior to 1978, most people in China were employed through a system of state-owned enterprises. Realizing that the needs of the country and its people for goods and services were not being met through this system and that the problem of youth unemployment were increasing, the State has started to encourage the growth of tertiary industries and related training programs. Tertiary industry includes the manufacture of daily necessities, handicrafts, furniture, foodstuffs, and services such as transportation, house repairs, catering and the operation of small food concessions.

Tertiary industries are established as local or neighborhood collectives, usually with government support. In 1980, more than half of the newly employed were absorbed by a collectively owned enterprise. For the millions of unskilled students annually graduating or leaving middle schools, the vocational training provided through tertiary industries is becoming increasingly important. The educational programs are small and informal, usually consisting of on-the-job training for entry level positions.

Officially, Chinese policy maintains there is no unemployment, only "workers waiting for jobs." State support for the development of tertiary industries is becoming increasingly important to the solution of what to do with "workers waiting for jobs."

Job Placement

Job placement until recently was the responsibility of the State. Individuals were assigned to jobs on a random basis through a master

plan for labor determined at the State, commune, or city level. Once assigned, an individual's job was considered guaranteed for life regardless of the quality or quantity of work performed. The concepts of career development and job mobility were unheard of.

Guaranteed life-long employment, also known as the "iron rice bowl," is coming under increasing scrutiny. Personal discussion with workers and cadres and a review of current literature reveals a growing sentiment for the elimination of State mandated job placement and guaranteed life-time employment.

Replacing the practice of state assigned jobs is a system, still in its infant stage, of job selection by individuals. Such a system has practical limitations however because of the dearth of vocational and technical education programs on both the middle and post-middle school level and the prohibition of travel for China's people.

On-the-Job Training

On-the-job training continues to prepare most workers for their first job, usually an unskilled or semiskilled position. Such programs may last for a period of a few weeks to several years, depending on the complexity of the job. On-the-job trainees receive a base pay plus welfare and medical benefits. An incentive bonus may be earned on jobs where such bonuses are given regular workers.

Apprenticeship is still an important method of preparing skilled workers. Although the system existed in China for centuries, it was given formal recognition immediately after the liberation in 1949. An apprentice is usually a graduate of a junior middle school (8th grade). Typically, the apprentice receives no wages, only an allowance for food, clothing, and living expenses. In addition, the apprentice re-

ceives free medical care and has access to welfare facilities and the equivalent of disability insurance. A typical apprenticeship lasts three years but may vary from two to four years depending on the job.

On-the-job training will continue to be an important part of China's vocational education for many years to come.

Reflections

Trends in vocational and technical education in the PRC must be viewed within the context of current national scrutiny, self-examination, and change. It is difficult to dispute that China has developed at an unprecedented rate since its founding in 1949. Its population has almost doubled from 548 million to one billion; the number of new industries has increased daily by approximately 21; today there are over 350,000 state- and collectively-owned industrial enterprises. New emphasis is being placed on small, individually operated businesses. Communicable diseases, by most accounts, have been eradicated; the mortality rate has dropped from 28 per thousand to 6.2 per thousand in 1980. Life expectancy has increased from 36 to 68 years.

But with the increased human well-being new problems are emerging. The decreased mortality rate has created a population majority of more than 650 million who do not remember the pre 1949 China and thus find it difficult to accept the current ideological rhetoric and slogans. This majority has lived through two decades of national and local power struggles followed most recently by public criticism of China's founder and national hero, Mao Zedong himself. It is difficult amid this confusion for youth to identify with the historic legends of Mao's "Long March," legends which provided the spiritual fabric to overcome the physical hardships amid a material vacuum during China's formative years.

A current Party platform urges young people to "take your destiny in your hands." Only a few years ago the Party was using tactics of mass mobilization to achieve national goals. Beginning in autumn of this year, the Ministry of Education has decided that a subject on ideology and conduct be taught in all primary school grades. The goal is to develop a "new, well educated generation with good morality." The movement emphases five "stresses" (decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals) and four "points of beauty" (beauty of mind, language, behavior, environment). What qualities will be this new ideology instill in future workers? How will the "stresses" and "points of beauty" be integrated into primary work-related programs?

The concept of egalitarianism for years dictated that all worker's wages be equal, regardless of training, education, or position. Metaphorically speaking, this practice was referred to as "everybody eating out of the same pot." But recently, leading members of the State Council have repeatedly stressed that the "road foward for our economy lies in enhancing economic results. This can only be achieved through mobilizing the masses' initiative and creativeness, tapping the potential in every field, reducing waste and using every means to raise beneficial results." So now an old socialist principle is being revived to replace the system of equal wages: "from each according to this ability, to each according to his work."

One thing is clear. If China is to achieve its goals of modernization and improvement of individual welfare, it will have to mobilize its natural and human resources on an unprecedented scale. This mobilization can only come with the continued growth in vocational and technical education at all levels.

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